



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Siblings in Christ of the Central/Southern Illinois Synod,

For many of us, 2022 represented a moment of hope. After the darkness and isolation of the pandemic, life has begun to return to normal –offering new opportunities for connection and renewed commitment to serving our neighbor. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service has embraced this moment; in the past year, we have grown exponentially in both size and scale, expanding our capacity to welcome immigrants and refugees.

With the help of people of faith and communities like yours, we were able to...

- help **16,690 children** reunify with their families or find safe, loving foster homes,
- resettle nearly **12,000 Afghans** forced to flee after Afghanistan fell under Taliban control,
- welcome **3,169 refugees** from countries across the world,
- and assist **18,262 people** seeking safety from Central America and beyond.

We continue to expand our slate of innovative programming to move beyond traditional resettlement into an empowered living experience that promotes not just surviving, but thriving.

That work reaches, too, into our media and advocacy footprint. You may have seen LIRS President and CEO Krish O'Mara Vignarajah on national news programs like *PBS Newshour*, *MSNBC*, *NPR*, the *BBC*, and others, advocating on behalf of our immigrant and refugee neighbors from Ukraine to Venezuela.

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

It remains a priority of ours in 2023 to combat the divisive rhetoric surrounding immigration and instead promote kindness, compassion, and inherent human dignity. We're so grateful for the ways that is already happening in the Central/Southern Illinois Synod! Your synod is an invaluable partner for [LIRS' Hope for the Holidays™](#): a program that distributes Christmas cards and gifts to people seeking safety in the U.S. As a result of the exemplary leadership of [St. John's Lutheran Church in Bloomington](#) and other partner hubs across the country, more than 25,000 Christmas cards with messages of love and hope were sent to our newest neighbors in 2022. Thank you!

We also invite you to consider additional ways to join us in the work of welcome. This year, we will continue to offer opportunities to get involved, including:

- advocating alongside LIRS and refugee neighbors in celebration of [World Refugee Day](#) on June 20th,
- equipping leaders and congregations to create more just and welcoming communities through the [LIRS Ambassador Network](#) and [EMMAUS Network for Congregations](#) throughout the year,
- and of course, sharing notes of welcome with children and families impacted by immigration detention through our [Hope for the Holidays™ program](#) this fall.

Together, we can realize Jesus's ministry of compassion and welcome. We're so grateful for your support and look forward to working alongside you in the coming year.

In peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chelsey Johnson".

Chelsey Johnson, LIRS Mobilization and Faith Relations